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The Blazed Trail

By STEWART
EDWARD
WHITE

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CHAPTER XXVI.

IN the meantime the main body of the crew under Thorpe and his foremen were briskly tumbling the logs into the current. The men had continually to keep alert, for at any moment they were called upon to exercise their best judgment and quickness to keep from being carried downward with the rush of the logs. Not infrequently a frowning sheer wall of forty feet would hesitate on the brink of plunge. Then Shearer himself proved his right to the title of river man.

Shearer wore calks nearly an inch in length. He had been known to ride ten miles without shifting his feet on a log so small that he could carry it without difficulty. For cool nerve he was unexcelled.

"I don't need you boys here any longer," he said quietly.

When the men had all withdrawn he walked confidently under the front of the railway, glancing with practiced eye at the perpendicular wall of logs over him. Then as a man pries jackstraws he clamped his peavey and tugged sharply. At once the railway flattened and toppled. A mighty splash, a fluff of flying foam and crushing timbers, and the spot on which the river man had stood was buried beneath twenty feet of solid green wood. To Thorpe it seemed that Shearer must have been overwhelmed, but the river man always mysteriously appeared at one side or the other, nonchalant, urging the men to work before the logs should have ceased to move. History stated that Shearer had never lost a man on the river simply and solely because he invariably took the dangerous tasks upon himself.

In three days the railways were broken. Now it became necessary to start the rear.

For this purpose Billy Camp, the cook, had loaded his cook stove, a quantity of provisions and a supply of bedding aboard a scow. At either end were long sweeps to direct its course. The craft was perhaps forty feet long, but rather narrow, in order that it might pass easily through the shoot of a dam. It was called the "wanigan."

The huge, unwieldy craft from that moment was to become possessed of the devil. Down the white water of rapids it would bump, smashing obstinately against boulders, against the branches of the stream side it would scrape, in the broad reaches it would sulk, refusing to proceed, and when expediency demanded its pause it would drag Billy Camp and his entire crew at the rope's end, while they tried vainly to snub it against successively uprooted trees and stumps. When at last the wanigan was moored fast for the night—usually a mile or so below the spot planned—Billy Camp pushed back his battered old brown derby hat, the badge of his office, with a sigh of relief. To be sure, he and his men had still to cut wood, construct cooking and camp fires, pitch tents, snip browse and prepare supper for seventy men, but the hard work of the day was over.

Along either bank, among the bushes, on sand bars and in trees, hundreds and hundreds of logs had been stranded

when the main drive passed. These logs the rear crew were engaged in restoring to the current.

And, as a man had to be able to ride any kind of log in any water, to propel that log by jumping on it, by rolling it squirrel fashion with the feet, by punting it as one would a canoe, to be skillful in pushing, prying and polling other logs from the quarter deck of the same cranky craft; as he must be prepared at any and all times to jump waist deep into the river, to work in ice water hours at a stretch; as he was called upon to break the most dangerous jams on the river, representing, as they did, the accumulation which the jam crew had left behind them, it was naturally considered the height of glory to belong to the rear crew. Here were the best of the Fighting Forty, men with a reputation as "white water birlers," men afraid of nothing.

Every morning the crews were divided into two sections under Kerlie and Jack Hyland. Each crew had charge of one side of the river. Scotty Parsons exercised a general supervisory eye over both crews. Shearer and Thorpe traveled back and forth the length of the drive, riding the logs down stream, but taking to a partly submerged pole trail when ascending the current. On the surface of the river in the clear water floated two long, graceful boats called bateaux. These were in charge of expert boatmen. They carried in racks a great supply of pike poles, peaveys, axes, rope and dynamite for use in various emergencies.

Intense rivalry existed as to which crew "sacked" the farthest down the stream in the course of the day. There was no need to urge the men. Some stood upon the logs, pushing mightily with the long pike poles. From one end of the rear to the other shouts, calls, warnings and jokes flew back and forth. Once or twice a vast roar of Homeric laughter went up as some unfortunate slipped and soused into the water. When the current slackened and the logs hesitated in their run the entire crew hastened, hobbling from log to log, down river to see about it. Then they broke the jam, standing surely on the edge of the great darkness, while the ice water sucked in and out of their shoes.

Behind the rear Big Junko poled his bateau backward and forward exploding dynamite. Many of the bottom tiers of logs in the railways had been frozen down, and Big Junko had to loosen them from the bed of the stream. He was a big man, this, as his nickname indicated, built of many awkwardnesses. His cheek bones were high, his nose flat, his lips thick and slabby. He sported a wide, ferocious straggling mustache and long eyebrows, under which gleamed little fierce eyes. His forehead sloped back like a beast's, but was always hidden by a disreputable felt hat. Big Junko did not know much and had the passions of a wild animal, but he was a reckless river man and devoted to Thorpe. Just now he exploded dynamite.

The sticks of powder were piled amidships. Big Junko crouched over them, inserting the fuses and caps, closing the openings with soap, finally

lighting them and dropping them into the water alongside, where they immediately sank. Then a few strokes of a short paddle took him barely out of danger. He huddled down in his craft, waiting. One, two, three seconds passed. Then a hollow boom shook the stream. A cloud of water sprang up, strangely beautiful. After a moment the great brown logs rose suddenly to the surface from below, one after the other, like leviathans of the deep.

Thorpe and Tim Shearer nearly always slept in a dog tent at the rear, though occasionally they passed the night at Dam Two, where Bryan Moloney and his crew were already engaged in sluicing the logs through the shoot.

The affair was simple enough. Long booms arranged in the form of an open V guided the drive to the sluice gate, through which a smooth apron of water rushed to turmoil in an eddying pool below. Two men tramped steadily backward and forward on the booms, urging the logs forward by means of long pike poles to where the suction could seize them. Below the dam the push of the sluice water forced them several miles down stream, where the rest of Bryan Moloney's crew took them in charge.

Thus through the wide gate nearly three-quarters of a million feet an hour could be run, and at length the last of the logs drifted into the wide dam pool. The rear had arrived at Dam Two, and Thorpe congratulated himself that one stage of his journey had been completed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE rear had been tenting at the dam for two days and was about ready to break camp when Jimmy Powers swung across the trail to tell them of the big jam.

Ten miles along the river bed the stream dropped over a little half falls into a narrow, rocky gorge. It was always an anxious spot for river drivers. The plunging of the logs head-on over the fall had so gouged out the soft rock below that an eddy of great power had formed in the basin. Here, in spite of all efforts, the jam had formed. The bed was completely filled, far above the level of the falls, by a tangle that defied the jam crew's best efforts.

The rear at once took the trail down the river. Thorpe and Shearer and Scotty Parsons looked over the ground.

Without delay the entire crew was set to work. Nearly a hundred men can pick a great many logs in the course of a day. Several times the jam started, but always "plugged" before the motion had become irresistible.

"We'll have to shoot," Shearer reluctantly decided.

The men were withdrawn. Scotty Parsons cut a sapling twelve feet long and trimmed it. Big Junko thawed his dynamite at a little fire, opening the ends of the packages in order that the steam generated might escape. When the powder was warm, Scotty bound twenty of the cartridges around the end of the sapling, adjusted a fuse in one of them and soaped the opening to exclude water. Then Big Junko thrust the long javelin down into the depths of the jam, leaving a thin stream of smoke behind him as he turned away, zigzagging awkwardly over the jam, the long, ridiculous tails of his brown cutaway coat drooping behind him as he leaped. A scant moment later the hoarse dynamite shouted.

Great chunks of timber shot to an inconceivable height. Entire logs lifted bodily into the air with the motion of a fish jumping. A fountain of water gleamed against the sun and showered down in fine rain. The jam shrugged and settled. That was all. The "shot" had failed.

The men ran forward, examining curiously the great hole in the log formation.

"We'll have to flood her," said Thorpe. So all the gates of the dam were raised, and the torrent tried its hand. It had no effect. Evidently the affair was not one of violence, but of patience. The crew went doggedly to work.

Day after day the clank, clank, clink of the peaveys sounded with the regularity of machinery. It was cruel, hard work. A man who has lifted his utmost strength into a peavey knows that. Any but the Fighting Forty would have grumbled.

Collins, the bookkeeper, came up to view the tangle. Later a photographer from Marquette took some views, and by the end of the week a number of curiosity seekers were driving over every day to see the big jam. A certain Chicago journalist in search of balsam



Threw his battered old felt hat defiantly.

health of lungs even sent to his paper a little item. This unexpectedly brought Wallace Carpenter to the spot.

The place was an amphitheater for such as chose to be spectators. They could stand or sit on the summit of the gorge cliffs, overlooking the river, the fall and the jam.

At last Shearer became angry. "We've been monkeying long enough," said he. "Next time we'll leave a center that will go out. We'll shut the dams down tight and dry pick out two wings that'll start her."

The dams were first run at full speed and then shut down. Hardly a drop of water flowed in the bed of the stream. The crews set laboriously to work to pull and roll the logs out in such flat fashion that a head of water should send them out.

This was even harder work than the other, for they had not the floating power of water to help them in tilting. As usual, part of the men worked below, part above.

Jimmy Powers, curly haired, laughing faced, was irrepressible. He badgered the others until they threw bark at him and menaced him with their peaveys. Always he had at his tongue's end the proper quip for the occasion, so that in the long run the work was lightened by him. When the men stopped to think at all they thought of Jimmy Powers with very kindly hearts, for it was known that he had had more trouble than most and that coin was not made too small for him to divide with a needy comrade.

Thorpe approved thoroughly of Jimmy Powers. He thought him a good

influence. He told Wallace so, standing among the spectators on the cliff top.

"He is all right," said Thorpe. "I wish I had more like him. The others are good boys too."

Five men were at the moment tugging futilely at a reluctant timber. They were attempting to roll one end of it over the side of another projecting log, but were continually foiled, because the other end was jammed fast. Each bent his knees, inserting his shoulders under the projecting peavey stock, to straighten in a mighty effort.

It was a fine spring day, clear eyed and crisp, with a hint of new foliage in the thick buds of the trees. The air was so pellucid that one distinguished without difficulty the straight entrance to the gorge a mile away, and even the West Bend, fully five miles distant.

Jimmy Powers took off his cap and wiped his forehead.

"You boys," he remarked politely, "think you are boring with a mighty big anger."

"My God!" screamed one of the spectators on top of the cliff.

At the same instant Wallace Carpenter seized his friend's arm and pointed.

Down the bed of the stream from the upper bend rushed a solid wall of water several feet high. It flung itself forward with the headlong impetus of a cascade. Even in the short interval between the visitor's exclamation and Carpenter's rapid gesture it had loomed in sight, twisted a dozen trees from the river bank and foamed into the entrance of the gorge. An instant later it collided with the tail of the jam.

Even in the railroad rush of those few moments several things happened. Thorpe leaped for a rope. The crew working on top of the dam ducked instinctively to right and left and began to scramble toward safety. The men below, at first bewildered and not comprehending, finally understood and ran toward the face of the jam with the intention of clambering up it. There could be no escape in the narrow canyon below, the walls of which rose sheer.

Then the flood hit square. A great sheet of water rose like surf from the tail of the jam; a mighty cataract poured down over its surface, lifting the free logs; from either wing timbers crunched, split, rose suddenly into wracked prominence, twisted beyond the semblance of themselves. Here and there single logs were even projected bodily upward, as an apple seed is shot from between the thumb and forefinger. Then the jam moved.

Scotty Parsons, Jack Hyland, Red Jacket and the forty or fifty men had reached the shore. By the wriggling activity which is a river man's alone they succeeded in pulling themselves beyond the snap of death's jaws. It was a narrow thing for most of them and a miracle for some.

Jimmy Powers, Archie Harris, Long Pine Jim, Big Nolan and Mike Moloney, the brother of Bryan, were in worse case. They were, as has been said, engaged in "battering" part of the jam about eight or ten rods below the face of it. When they finally understood that the affair was one of escape, they ran toward the jam, hoping to climb out. Then the crash came. They heard the roar of the waters, the wrecking of the timbers; they saw the logs bulge outward in anticipation of the break. Immediately they turned and fled, they knew not where.

All but Jimmy Powers. He stopped short in his tracks and threw his battered old felt hat defiantly full into the face of the destruction hanging over him. Then, his bright hair blowing in the wind of death, he turned to the spectators standing helpless and paralyzed forty feet above him.

It was an instant's impression—the arrested motion seen in the flash of lightning—and yet to the onlookers it

(Continued on 4th page.)